

Communist Atrocities to be Aired at Prison Camp Commander Trial paulbogdanor.com

LEFTIST BLOODBATH

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October 24, 2000 Incarcerated in gulags for anti-communist activities, Alexandru Salca is now on his deathbed. His last wish before he dies is for the world to know the inhumanity of Romania's brutal communist regime. If he were well, Salca would testify at the trial of Col. Gheorghe Craciun, a former communist secret police officer, charged with the deaths of 216 prisoners as commander of the Aiud prison four decades ago. It's the first time a senior communist official from the 1950s is being brought to justice, thanks to efforts by former political prisoners. Craciun denies the charges. But the trial was postponed Tuesday because Craciun had no lawyer and refused to show up for the opening session. The Bucharest trial judge rescheduled the session for Dec. 5, ordered a defense attorney to be appointed and threatened to bring Craciun to the courtroom forcibly if he refuses to attend. Six former political prisoners who formed Romania's resistance against communism came to the courtroom Tuesday. Survivors say they are not seeking revenge or even punishment for Craciun, who ran Aiud from 1958 to 1964. They just want the truth to be told about the camp before they die. Located some 187 miles northwest of Bucharest, Aiud was one of Romania's harshest penitentiaries. Some 100,000 peasants, intellectuals and members of the pre-communist government are believed to have perished in prison or while building the Black Sea Canal, a 50-mile long channel linking the sea to the Danube River. Romania's leaders after the 1989 revolt that toppled and executed former dictator Nicolae Ceausescu themselves had belonged to the communist elite and punished only a few top communists. "Craciun should have been charged 10 years ago, when communism ended," but officials' first concern was to protect the secret police, or Securitate, said Salca, a railway worker sentenced to 40 years in prison in 1957 because he was a member of Romania's resistance to the communists. Now, "many victims are dead and those that are alive are ill," Salca said. The 78-year-old lies in bed, his swollen liver and emaciated frame evident below a swaddle of blankets. He is suffering from cirrhosis he developed in Aiud, has diabetes, and has been discharged from Brasov hospital, which can do no more for him. But Salca is lucid. His rasping voice is punctuated by agonizing bouts of coughing and breathlessness that bring color to his sallow face. If he appeared in court, he said he would testify that prisoners were refused medicine, slept on wooden planks with no blankets, endured bitter winters and ate sheep's intestines or macaroni with worms. If they refused to recant their anti-communist beliefs, they were put in solitary confinement and beaten. Salca prayed every night for strength. He was freed with other political detainees when a general amnesty was declared in 1964. Some 103,000 prisoners survived. Craciun, 87, is unrepentant and said he is too sick to attend the trial. He claimed that no prisoner died when he was ran Aiud, and that he is being harassed. Asked if he had any regrets, he said, "Yes, they should have raised a statue to me. ... I liberated 4,000 prisoners." But prisoners say he kept them locked up for as long as he could. "He was a sadist," said former prisoner Constantin Iulian. Salca, who has written three books on his experiences, said he would tell military prosecutors that the cruelest part was the Craciun jailers' attempts to break inmates' spirits. Nuclear scientist George Manu, who suffered from tuberculosis, was offered medication that would have saved his life, in exchange for denouncing his beliefs. He refused and died, Salca and Iulian said. Cells were secretly monitored and inmates were encouraged to inform on one another and denounce their belief in God, and their faith in their families, friends and cell mates. Those who did received medicine and better food, and were moved to more comfortable quarters. Wives who were not imprisoned were forced to divorce their husbands and denounce them to find work. Salca's wife, Viorica, was kept in a cell with their 3-month-old baby and interrogated about her husband's activities. She divorced him, but they were reunited after he left prison and remarried. She now looks after him in his final days. Some fear the memory of that era is fading, even

among those who suffered most. “Some people are even beginning to thank Craciun for saving their lives,” said Lucia Hossu Longhin, who directed the documentary series, *Memorial of Suffering*. One who will never forget is Iulian, 71, an engineer who spent 14 years in communist prisons and also worked on the Black Sea Canal. “We are still fighting communism,” he said.